

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today blasted federal officials for failing to implement a meaningful drug testing program for commercial truck drivers. DeFazio, the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, held a hearing to review the vulnerabilities of the Drug and Alcohol Testing (DAT) programs administered by motor carriers. DeFazio described the findings as “shocking.”

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The General Accountability Office (GAO) has found that 100 percent of the collection facilities they tested in an undercover operation failed to secure the facility from substances that could be used to adulterate or dilute urine samples. There are an estimated 10,000 facilities that provide urine specimen collection for DOT-regulated industries and over 700,000 commercial truck drivers operating in the country. When collectors don't follow required protocols and facilities are not in compliance with DOT regulations, drug users can evade detection.

Additionally, in 2004 report, the FMCSA found that the agency needs a national database to get at the serious problem of job hopping. Currently, it's possible, and not uncommon, for a driver who tests positive while driving for one company, to go to work driving for another company without receiving treatment and without consequence as it's up to the employee to self-report any past positive drug tests to a new employer. To date, the FMCSA has not made progress in establishing this national database.

The following is DeFazio's opening statement at today's hearing:

“As it turns out, here in the United States of America, we have no meaningful program of drug testing for commercial truck drivers. None. We're going to hear about that today. The collection facilities are easily penetrated with false drivers licenses. Devices are easily smuggled into facilities to alter urine samples -- a host of these products are readily available on the internet.

What's more is that the FMCSA has been aware of this problem. In their testimony, they will

say they weren't surprised by the GAO findings that the collection facilities/testing facilities are loophole ridden and provide tests whose results were easily modified and made meaningless.

We're going to hear testimony that there was a 2004 report about the problem of job hopping so even when the faulty drug testing system works, drivers who test positive driving for one company can go to work driving for another company without getting treatment, consequence or knowledge.

No one knows how many drivers abuse drugs but conservative estimates are it's 1.7 percent -- that's 170,000 truck drivers driving 80,000 pound trucks on our highways and through our communities putting the public at severe risk. The random anonymous testing done in Oregon earlier this year shows the percent could be five times higher. We don't know. There is no meaningful system. This is shocking.

This situation cries out for action. If the FMCSA lacks legal authority to implement a database to prevent job hopping, they should tell us. But their testimony says they're still thinking about it. We need a national system so when a drug abusing truck driver, who doesn't complete treatment, tries to go to a different trucking company and start driving again, we stop him cold. I applaud North Carolina and the few other states that have taken steps that we could take nationally to prevent people from getting killed by drug abusing truck drivers on our highways. I intend to work to see that Congress does just that.